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ABSTRACT

The value of graduate education at the master's degree level is considered by the president of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in an address to a 1980 conference of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. Graduate education at the master's degree level involves the overwhelming majority of graduate students. In addition, in the field of nursing there is a need for more education and training at the graduate level, and particularly at the master's degree level. It is suggested that the assessment of quality must recognize the diversity of objectives of various programs. A questionnaire containing 60 statements concerning characteristics of doctoral programs was field tested as part of a doctoral program evaluation project of the Graduate Record Examination Board and the CGS, which has also engaged in a similar project at the master's degree level. It is proposed that attention needs to be given to further extending present federal student support programs to candidates for graduate degrees, particularly during their first year of study, so as to reduce the exclusionary pressures against qualified students who have financial limitations. It is concluded that: the master's degree is the growth industry of graduate education; it is a level of higher education that a larger and larger percentage of society will continue to seek to satisfy their personal desire for educational advancement; it is a level of higher education that society needs in order to address increasingly complex problems; and it is a level of higher education needed by society so that leaders have better informed and educated followers. (SW)

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All issues in the Publication 80 series will be devoted to master's education in nursing.

The Value and Future of Graduate Education Leading to a Master's Degree: A National Perspective

Michael J. Pelczar, Jr.

President
The Council of Graduate Schools in the United States

The Value and Future of Graduate Education Leading to a Master's Degree: A National Perspective

There are several characteristics of the master's degree that have remained true throughout its history, from prosperous times up to the present era of austerity. Change has been constant in the history of the master's degree. The word "master" comes from the Latin, magister, which means "teacher," and from the time of its origins, the master's degree has been strongly associated with pedagogy. It is an academic title of remarkable durability. Today, its value is debated by some, and its meaning is a matter of disagreement. But it has been an academic standard that has commanded greater or lesser respect for 800 years.

Perennial controversies and questions surround this degree. The intellectual and educational worth of a given master's can only be ascertained by consulting the holder's transcript and graduate school record. There is no consensus about the experiences that a master's degree program should offer; there is no agreement on the skills and abilities that one who completes a master's degree should be expected to have. Since its establishment, the Council of Graduate Schools has argued that the master's degree should be promoted and strengthened. We believe it must designate an integral level of achievement in higher education—the acquisition of a level of higher knowledge—and not be viewed merely as an ornate or a genteel and empty relic from the past.

The first master of arts degree was given at the University of Paris in the twelfth century. It was the highest degree offered by the arts faculty, and it served as a credential for becoming a member of that faculty. The holder could also study toward the doctorate in medicine, law, or theology. Gradually, the master's degree fell into disuse in continental Europe or was granted, with little or no additional scholarly labor, as an adjunct to the baccalaureate. Being the highest earned degree in England and subsequently in America, it retained greater prestige there for a time. In 1642 when Harvard graduated its first class, the master's degree indicated rigorous academic achievement: three years of study beyond the bachelor's level. However, by the early nineteenth century, the master's at Harvard, as well as at all other universities in the United States, diminished in significance.

The University of Michigan is often credited with reviving the master's degree. In 1858 its regents resolved that the master's be conferred on holders of a baccalaureate, provided they pursued two courses each semester for one year, passed an examination in at least three of the studies, and presented a thesis. The state universities of North Carolina

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Presented by Michael J. Pelczar, Jr., Ph.D., on March 19, 1980, in Lexington, Kentucky, at the AACN conference on "Quality, Diversity, and Flexibility in Graduate Education for Nursing at the Master's Level."

and Georgia adopted these requirements soon thereafter. By the beginning of the twentieth century, variations on these requirements characterized master's degree programs in most institutions. The master's degree achieved its own identity, separate and apart from the doctorate, when colleges and universities began to expand their offerings in education and to admit women to graduate study. In 1939 it was estimated that three-fourths of liberal arts master's degrees were earned by public school teachers. During the next two decades, growth of master's degree education was clearly related to the growth in primary and secondary education.

In the 1960s a new momentum was given to graduate education. Soviet space achievements laid new expectations on the nation's graduate schools. They were asked to assume the burden of preparing scientific and technical specialists who would enable the United States to regain her superiority in space science. Congress enacted a number of programs that provided fellowships and traineeships toward this national objective. However, these assisted graduate schools principally in the support of doctoral training. This was a symbol of the times as far as graduate education was concerned. In the gathering commitment to advanced studies, it was the doctorate, and not the master's, that received special attention.

The neglected state of the master's degree was addressed at the first annual meeting of The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) held in December of 1961. At the annual meetings of CGS throughout the early 1960s, speakers proposed ways to turn the master's degree to a respected level of learning. For example:

- the "M.A.-3," a three-year master's program designed for persons interested only in college teaching and not in research;
- the master of philosophy program at Yale, which had similar objectives;
- the recognition of the M.A. or M.S. as the terminal degree for teachers at junior colleges.

By the mid-1960s, outside the field of education, the master's was coming to be regarded as the required degree for certain other professions. The "practitioner" master's was the fully acceptable credential for:

- social work (the M.S.W.);
- planning (the Master of Urban Planning);
- high-level business management (the M.B.A.).

Groups and associations within these professions sought to shape master's degree programs according to their concept of what individuals who practiced them should know, exercising considerable influence over requirements.

By 1970, the tenth anniversary of The Council of Graduate Schools, attendees at its annual meeting were told that:

- among all four-year institutions in the United States an average of 39 percent of the faculty members held the master's as their highest degree;
- among all two-year institutions, the figure was 73 percent.

The criticism from the "New Left" that graduate schools were guilty of processing students for a dehumanizing technological system fostered new expressions of concern for social problems by all of higher education. Some new master's programs were specifically intended to address such problems; for example, urban studies, ecology and environmental studies, black studies, and women's studies. Because these were new disciplines and sometimes fashioned from old ones refitted to new terminology, they tended to refuel the long-standing controversy about "quality" and master's-level education. The final report of the National Board on Graduate Education (1975) commented on master's degree graduate education as follows:

> *Master's level work with an applied, career-oriented focus is likely to increase . . . .* and *Many of the innovations in graduate education should be attempted initially at the master's level and thus the degree warrants a resurgence of attention.*

I am particularly pl. ased to have this opportunity to meet with you at this conference and to discuss with you graduate education at the master's degree level. My pleasure stems from several observations:

First: Very frequently, conferences on graduate education center upon doctorate-level education. The magnitude and importance of graduate education at the master's degree level is thus slighted. Graduate education at the master's degree level involves the overwhelming majority of graduate students. In 1979 there were approximately 330,000 master's degrees awarded, compared to 30,850 doctorate degrees. Doctorate degrees decreased by 2.7 percent from the preceding year; in 1977 there were 31,713 doctorates awarded. The number of graduate degrees awarded at the master's and doctorate levels during the last ten years (1970-1979) reveals that the number of master's degrees awarded has increased by more than 100,000 (from approximately 208,000 to 320,000), whereas doctorate degrees have experienced a slight drop (from approximately 32,000 to 31,000). During the same period master's degrees in nursing have doubled, going from approximately 2,000 to 4,000.

Second: My second reason for being enthusiastic about this conference is that your profession is comparatively young in the field of graduate education. This fact, taken together with the numerous changes occurring in the nursing profession, suggests many new opportunities. For example, the availability of new and advanced knowledge, the introduction of sophisticated technology, the development of new areas of specialization, the increased role in management responsibilities—all of these and other developments are making increasing demands for higher education for nurses. Barbara Ellis, staff editor of the magazine *Hospitals* (January 1, 1980) stated it this way:

> *Because of the increasing technical complexity of health care delivery, many nurse leaders agree that more advanced and extensive preparation of nurses at all levels is becoming necessary.*

I interpret this to mean, at least in part, a need for more education and training at the graduate level, and particularly at the master's degree level.

Third: A third reason for my pleasure in being invited as a participant in your conference is the theme which you have identified, namely—QUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND FLEXIBILITY.

Quality: Everyone is for quality, even though we may not have unanimous agreement on what constitutes quality. I have argued, and I continue to support vigorously, the concept that quality of graduate education programs needs to be assessed in terms of multidimensional characteristics. The fact remains that quality of graduate programs means different things to individuals associated with different kinds of graduate programs and different kinds of institutions. The dimensions of quality as expressed by a graduate faculty member associated with a major doctoral program in the natural sciences, we will agree, would differ from those expressed by a graduate faculty member at an institution which emphasizes master's degrees. However, there exists a nagging attitude that you don't have *quality* until you have programs like the major comprehensive universities and at the doctoral level. Just as recently as last month at the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools meeting in Memphis, I heard a dean ask a question on this very point, namely, "Can those of us that are primarily master's degree institutions get recognition as having quality programs?"

The assessment of quality of graduate programs is a high priority issue. The Sloan Commission on Higher Education, under the direction of Dr. Carl Kaysen (MIT), has been making a study of higher education and will issue a series of recommendations. Among these recommendations is one that calls for all programs to be evaluated by each State's Commission (or other office) on Higher Education and that the results of the evaluation be made public one year later! The Council of Graduate Schools has long been concerned, as well as active, in the area of program evaluation. We have just completed, in collaboration with the Graduate Record Examination Board, an "instrument" for the evaluation of doctoral programs. It is entitled "Graduate Program Self-Assessment Service."

An elaborate questionnaire was developed and field tested with 25 diverse universities participating. The programs included in the development of the questionnaire were chemistry, history, and psychology. Questions were directed to students, faculty, and alumni. The core of each questionnaire consists of lists of about 60 statements concerning characteristics of the program, with agree/disagree or poor-to-excellent ratings as response options. Judgments about individual items are combined to form scale scores to describe the following general areas of program functioning:

- environment for learning,
- scholarly excellence,
- faculty concern for students,
- quality of teaching,
- curriculum,
- departmental procedures,
- student commitment and motivation,
- student satisfaction,

- student assistantship experiences,
- faculty work environment,
- faculty research activity,
- alumni dissertation experiences.

Where appropriate, identical items appear on each of the three questionnaires, thus allowing departments to compare the options of *faculty*, *students*, and *alumni* in each area.

We (CGS) are currently engaged in a similar project at the master's degree level. Dr. Herbert Weisinger, formerly graduate dean at SUNY-Stony Brook and a member of a CGS panel that discussed this topic, had this to say:

Thus, it appears to me that it is desirable to go forward with the application of assessment of graduate education at the master's degree level using the multidimensional approach of CGS/GREB for the Assessment of Quality of Doctoral Programs.

If it is necessary that graduate schools show that they are engaged in a substantive systematic review of their master's programs and that the use of these reviews is utilized in making decisions about the program and the school, the methodology under discussion can provide such review.

The methodology can be modified for use at the master's level. In my opinion, it can be used with other procedures for program evaluation.

The methodology has captured the imagination of faculties at several institutions. Dean Weisinger extrapolated on the potential of this assessment of quality process in the following manner:

Perhaps the CGS/GREB methodology for assessing quality applied to the master's degree level is like Sears Roebuck Co., "It has almost everything." Or perhaps the multidimensional approach is like Bayer Aspirin 'It works wonders." Or like Tide, "It gets the stains out that others leave behind." Or like VO 5 Hair Spray "It holds through all kinds of weather." And finally, like Alka Seltzer, "Try it, you'll like it!"

The assessment of quality of master's degree programs must recognize the *diversity of objectives* of various programs. Last spring, The Council of Graduate Schools, together with the Middlestates Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and University College of the University of Maryland, sponsored a conference on the "Assessment of Quality of Master's Degree Programs." Among the speakers at this conference were several persons from industry who, to the surprise of many of the deans, expressed some disenchantment with the master's degree holders that come to industry. Their major reservations about academic programs were: The curriculum is too theoretical and often out-of-date.

This is a serious accusation. Richard Ognibene, the graduate dean at the College of Saint Rose, followed up on this at the December 1979 annual CGS meeting. He presented a paper entitled "The Master's Graduate in Government and Industry." He cited, among other matters, that industry is moving into graduate education because of the lack of recognition by universities and colleges, or their reluctance, to provide appropriate cur-

ricula. Dean Ognibene also cites a recent survey of engineering graduates conducted by Dean Giordano of Polytechnic Institute of New York. Responses were received from 178 master's degree graduates from the class of 1973. Their responses included such recommendations as: more career-oriented seminars, the desirability of having some practicing engineers as instructors, more relation of theory to practice, and more integration of knowledge. Their recommendations suggest that curricula need some revisions.

Changes in curricula are taking place. We have been following, with more than casual interest, changes in humanities programs. Here are some specific examples:

- Bowling Green University offers a master's degree program in applied philosophy. Internships are available to graduate students for work in government, industry, or private associations;
- University of California-Santa Barbara offers a master's degree program in applied history;
- University of Texas-Austin advises its humanities graduate students to supplement their specialization in humanities with policy science, business administration, computer science, or other subject areas;
- programs in medicine, engineering, and business are being supplemented with significant units of humanities subjects.

Unfortunately, the recommendations for program modifications are accepted begrudgingly and slowly in some faculty quarters. Academe, despite its pursuit of experimentation, has a record of reluctance for change. The Academy for Educational Development addresses this image of educational institutions in its recent 1980 annual report. Their report is introduced as follows:

The noted historian, Arnold Toynbee, observed that when civilizations fail to meet the challenges of their time, they stagnate, decline, and die.

This profound observation applies with equal force to educational institutions. Like civilizations, they invariably face crises, each of which is a challenge to the institution's continued stability and growth. If an institution fails to meet these challenges with resourcefulness and creativity, it, like the civilization of which it is a part, will stagnate, decline, and face possible extinction.

Historically, educational institutions have not had enviable records in adapting to the needs and challenges of society. Once established, they tend to become traditional and inflexible, clinging to their individual identities rather than adjusting to changing needs.

Graduate education is increasingly expected to serve as the avenue to a thorough understanding of specific fields and as the necessary minimum preparation for certain professional careers. Thus, it can reasonably be said that we have reached the point where the master's degree bears much the same relation to the bachelor's degree as the latter bore to the high school diploma two generations ago. As baccalaureate work became widely demanded there was a general expectation that society should provide financial assistance to qualified students who were economically disadvan-

taged. This commitment has done much to dispel the perception that undergraduate education would remain available to a well-to-do population. There has not been an extension of this principle to graduate education, however, despite its growing generality. Because of this deficiency and because of severe limitations on existing support, many qualified students are unable to secure its benefits because of their financial limitations. Accordingly, attention needs to be given to further extending present federal student support programs to candidates for graduate degrees, particularly during their first year of study, so as to reduce the exclusionary pressures against such students.

I will conclude with these general observations:

- the master's degree is the growth industry of graduate education; it is growing and it will continue to grow more;
- it is a level of higher education that a larger and larger percentage of society will continue to seek to satisfy their personal desire for educational advancement;
- it is a level of higher education that society needs in order to address more satisfactorily increasingly complex problems;
- it is a level of higher education needed by a larger sector of society so that our *leaders* have better informed (educated) followers. Good leadership is significantly enhanced by well-informed followers.

Addendum

Dr. Pelczar addressed the topic "The Value and Future of Graduate Education Leading to a Master's Degree" from a national perspective.

Questions which followed his presentation as well as comments identified later in the conference pointed up certain issues of particular interest and concern to nursing.

Briefly, some of these were:

- Reference to the master's degree as a "respected level of learning."
- The master's degree as required for certain professions.
- Master's level work with an applied "career-oriented" focus is likely to increase.
- The "practitioner" master's as an acceptable academic credential.
- Can primarily master's degree institutions be recognized as having quality programs?
- More relation of theory to practice; recognition by universities of the consumers' point of view.
- The desirability of having some practicing (engineers) as faculty.
- All graduate education must constantly be subjected to evaluation; assessment of both master's and doctoral programs is essential—according to their different objectives.